

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 043151

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HABIB

FOL REPEAT OF PHNOM PENH 3456 TO SECSTATE FEB 25

QTE:

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 3456

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, EAID, MASS, PFOR, CB, US, SOPN

SUBJECT: REQUEST BY TV CORRESPONDENTS TO FILM STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR ASSESSING CAMBODIAN SITUATION

REF: PHNOM PENH 3455

1. FOLLOWING PRESS BRIEFING BY DCM THIS MORNING, PETER COLLINS OF CBS ASKED IF HE COULD FILM (ON EXCLUSIVE BASIS) SENIOR EMBASSY OFFICIAL, PREFERABLY AMBASSADOR, MAKING STATEMENT GIVING OUR ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SITUATION IN AND OF CAMBODIA. DCM RESPONDED THAT WE WOULD CONSIDER IT, BUT IF AMBASSADOR AGREED TO GO ON CAMERA IT WOULD HAVE TO BE FOR ALL TV CORRESPONDENTS AND NOT ON EXCLUSIVE BASIS FOR CBS ALONE.

2. I BELIEVE SUCH A FILMED STATEMENT, WHICH WOULD PRESUMABLY BE USED ON US TV NEWS PROGRAMS, COULD BE BENEFICIAL AS FURTHER SUPPORT TO RECENT STATEMENTS BY THE PRESIDENT,
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SECRETARY KISSINGER, SECRETARY SCHLESINGER AND ASSISTANT

SECRETARY HABIB, WHICH WE HAVE SEEN IN WIRELESS FILE, IN MOBILIZING CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC OPINION IN FAVOR OF SUPPLEMENTAL AID REQUEST FOR CAMBODIA. SUGGESTED STATEMENT, TO BE SPOKEN EXTEMPORANEOUSLY BY AMBASSADOR, FOLLOWS. IF DEPARTMENT CONCURS, REQUEST REPLY ASAP WITH ANY SUGGESTED ALTERATIONS.

3. BEGIN QUOTE.

THE MILITARY SITUATION AROUND PHNOM PENH IS GRIM BUT BY NO MEANS DESPERATE. EVERY YEAR AT AROUND THIS TIME DURING THE DRY SEASON THE COMMUNIST SIDE LAUNCHES AN OFFENSIVE. THIS YEAR THEY HAVE HAD LESS SUCCESS THAN THEY DID LAST YEAR IN REDUCING AND PENETRATING THE CAPITAL'S DEFENSIVE PERIMETER. THE ENEMY HAS EMBARKED ON A STRATEGY-- A NOT UNINTELLIGENT ONE FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW, I MIGHT ADD--OF ATTACKING THE CAPITAL'S TWO VITAL LIFELINES, BY ROCKETING POCHENTONG AIRFIELD AND BY SEEDING THE LOWER MEKONG RIVER WITH MINES AND ATTACKING CONVOYS FROM THE SHORES WITH MUCH HEAVIER WEAPONS THAN WERE USED IN THE PAST. POCHENTONG AIRPORT REMAINS OPEN THOUGH UNDER DAILY ROCKET ATTACK BUT THE LOWER MEKONG HAS BEEN CLOSED TO CONVOYS THROUGHOUT FEBRUARY.

4. WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE KHMER REPUBLIC'S MILITARY FORCES WILL SUCCEED IN SOLVING THESE TWO PROBLEMS SHORTLY. IN THE MEANTIME WE ARE SUPPLYING THE CAPITAL BY AIR WITH ITS VITAL NEEDS OF AMMUNITION, RICE AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS. THE KHMERS OF THIS SIDE ARE DETERMINED TO DEFEND THEIR FREEDOM BUT WE MUST PROVIDE THE WHEREWITHAL, FOR THERE IS NO ONE ELSE ABLE TO HELP THEM. THEY ARE ALSO DETERMINED TO FIND A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION TO THIS CONFLICT AND HAVE REPEATEDLY OFFERED TO ENTER INTO UNCONDITIONAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE OTHER SIDE TO FIND A COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT. IN THE MEANTIME THEY MUST CONTINUE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES, BUT OUR SUPPLY PIPELINE WILL RUN DRY IN A MATTER OF WEEKS. THAT IS WHY THE ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON HAS ASKED THE CONGRESS FOR SUPPLEMENTAL AID FOR CAMBODIA. WITHOUT SUCH AID THE KHMERS OF THE REPUBLIC WILL BE FORCED TO GIVE UP THE STRUGGLE, NOT BECAUSE OF LACK OF WILL, OR OUT OF CONFIDENTIAL

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A SENSE OF DESPAIR, BUT BECAUSE AMERICA HAS SAID IT CAN NO LONGER SUPPLY THE FOOD AND THE ARMS FOR THEM TO CONTINUE. I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WISH TO DEPRIVE THE KHMERS OF THE CHANCE TO BRING THIS TRAGIC CONFLICT TO A PEACEFUL COMPROMISE SOLUTION THAT WILL END THE SUFFERING OF ALL OF THE KHMER PEOPLE.
END QUOTE.

5. ABOVE IS ABOUT TWO MINUTES LONG.
DEAN UNQTE KISSINGER

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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